

TEXAS FOLKLORE AND GERMAN CULTURE

by Francis Edward Abernethy

In addition to the herding instinct, a people's folklore is the bond that holds the group together as a cooperating, working, and surviving society. A band of people sing the same songs and know the same dances; they dress alike and observe the same customs and have the same manners; they worship the same gods in the same way; and they survive as a result of the strength of these common bonds. During the easy times the bonds are loose. The old gods are forgotten. Each in his prosperity drifts through the community increasing his separateness and individuality. But when the hard times come, from trouble within or enemies without, the old lore and the old laws are again remembered and used to shore up the group's defenses against adversity and disintegration.

The folklore of Texas is the weaving together of the many skeins of tradition brought by the many nationalities that settled this land. Except for the Anglos, the Mexicans, and the blacks, the most noticeable ethnic group from early colonial days to the present has been the Germans. The importance of the German element in Texas society is marked by the fact that the Governor's message and the secession convention reports of 1861 were sent out in three languages: English, Spanish, and German; and a hundred years later in the 1960 census 500,000 Texans listed their direct ancestry as German.

Germans left their mother country and came to Texas for many reasons: overpopulation, a rural economic depression, the Romantic revolutionary spirit, the Industrial Revolution, and compulsory military training, to mention a few. They left to rebuild fortunes or to seek new freedoms, or both. The best and the worst—nobility, artisans, and laborers—came to Texas. Romantic idealists came to form socialist communes at Bettina and Sisterdale and intellectual communes where Latin was spoken at Latium and Tusculum. And some came for the great adventure of living in a new land.

Whatever their reasons for coming and whatever attitudes they had about their mother country, they were still Germans when they arrived. The songs they sang, the stories they told, and their customs and traditions were

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still German. They brought cures and curses and recipes that were older than the times of their grandparents. They brought their tools and ways of building houses and fences and furniture that would always link their styles with the ways of the Old Country. They brought the bondings of their German lives that had been a part of their generations for centuries, and they mixed them with their new Texas environment and experiences. And out of this new German culture they created their own kind of Texas folklore.

One kind of folklore is legend, which is the folk history of a people. Legends tell of the past, not in a scientifically historical sense but in the way that the people see themselves. Legends may not catch the letter of the facts, but they catch the spirit. Thus in telling the tales of the German migration from the Gulf up the Guadalupe to the promised Fisher-Miller land, the stories deal more with the adventures of that hejira than with the cultural near-collapse of parts of the group. The stories illustrate the admirable qualities of these ancestor pioneers as they encountered the frontier and the wild Indians and animals of that strange and frightening new land.

Frank Dobie recounts a legend that grew out of this movement of German settlers up the Guadalupe toward the grant lands. It is one of the Pacing White Stallion stories that he used in *The Mustangs*. A little German girl was tied on to the back of an old pack mare that trailed along with the wagon train and carried sacks of corn meal. One afternoon the horse and girl wandered off and were separated from the train. The mare joined a herd of horses led by a magnificent and lordly Pacing White Stallion, which chewed through the ropes, gently lifted the girl off the mare, and left her while he and the mare wandered off for a tryst. Two days later the mare returned along with the stallion and the rest of the herd. The stallion lifted the child back on to the mare, and the mare returned with her to the wagon train and her distraught parents. She told this story to her grandchildren and as proof showed scars on her legs where the horses had nipped her getting at the sacks of corn meal.¹

Very little legendary material developed around Prince Karl von Solms-Braunfels, the first Commissioner of the *Adelsverein*. His particular aristocratic attitudes and his poor leadership did not inspire the sort of feeling that gives rise to legend. He was accused of trying to reinstitute German feudalism among Texas Germans, an accusation he indignantly denied; and his financial naïveté, paid for by the deprivations of his colonists, made him more of a villain than a hero to his people. Frederick Law Olmsted, who visited the German Texans in 1854, passed on the following evaluation of Prince Karl, which he must have arrived at from listening to the settlers because the Prince had been gone from Texas for nine years. Prince Karl, he said, "appears to [have been] an amiable fool, aping among the log cabins the nonsense of medieval courts. In the course of a year he was laughed out of the country."²

Prince Karl did, however, contribute to one German family's legends. Fritz Ernst (son of Friedrich Ernst, the founder of Industry), Prince Karl's guide and translator, is credited with out-hunting the Prince's *Jäger* ("hunter") and with single-handedly freeing the Prince's boat from a sandbar off Indianola after all others had given up. In another Ernst family tale, Fritz unceremoniously falls to on a piece of watermelon before the Prince begins to eat his.³ Prince Karl becomes the epitome of the snobbish Old World aristocrat to be put in his place by the self-reliant and democratic Germans of the New World.

On the other hand, many stories have survived about John Meusebach, his successor. Otfried Hans Freiherr von Meusebach, as he was known in the Old Country, was a controversial and legendary character during his own time, who as soon as he boarded ship for the Americas democratically changed his name to John O. Meusebach. As titular head of the German colonists for the *Adelsverein*, he was in charge of finances and was held responsible when money and supplies were not forthcoming, as was frequently the case. But he gained the reputation of a man who could meet the challenge of the occasion. According to one story, he dissuaded a disgruntled settler from doing him violence by challenging him and winning in a two-man *Schützenfest*. He quelled the violent anger of another by maintaining an unruffled calm. Meusebach was a strong-nerved man who could handle physical violence. Once Meusebach was cornered by a group of about 120 unhappy settlers who blamed him because they had not received the land and assistance they had been promised by the *Adelsverein*. At one point they were ready to hang him, but again his composure—and a box of cigars which he passed around—calmed the mob and eventually dispersed it. Meusebach continued his leadership of the colony.⁴

The Comanches of the Hill Country referred to Meusebach as *El Sol Colorado*, The Red Sun. The name was given to him by Santa Anna, one of the chiefs, when during the 1847 treaty meeting Meusebach and his men discharged their guns before meeting with the Indians to show that they had no fear for their safety. In another account of the same episode, Meusebach's party fired their guns into the air at the request of the Comanches, who also fired theirs.⁵ According to Meusebach family legend, Santa Anna gave him the name because he was a man to be looked up to, like the sun. His fiery red beard and head of hair could also account for the epithet. A legend about the man concerns his red hair and his negotiations with the Waco Indians. When Meusebach walked forward into the meeting place on the Comal River, twenty squaws grabbed him, dragged him to the river bank, and tried to wash the red out of his hair. They soon gave up and let him go. According to his biographer, Meusebach remained unperturbed.⁶

Although there are stories of chance encounters with and raids and killings by the Indians, who between 1861 and 1870 killed nine persons and

stole two children in Gillespie County, the enduring legend is the epic meeting of the heroic Meusebach with the Comanches on the San Saba and the signing of a treaty, which finally gave the Germans access to the Fisher-Miller lands. This treaty of 1847, which opened up 3,878,000 acres to settlement, was the only major Indian treaty in Texas that was honored by both sides. Much of its success was due to Meusebach's commanding manner and the impressive way in which he dealt with the Indians. His imperturbability as he moved among the teepees of the most feared Indians of the Americas and his courage in coming directly to them were qualities the Comanches respected. Even after Meusebach's tenure as head of the *Adelsverein*, the Germans took pains to stand by their commitments to show hospitality to the Indian and not to invade his hunting ground.

During the negotiations, while the Indians were deliberating over the terms, Meusebach and a small group including Ferdinand Roemer, who was to become the Father of Texas Geology, made an exploratory trip up the San Saba River. Their purpose was to find the old Spanish mission and fort that even then was the subject of many legends, especially stories concerning New Spain's third richest silver mine, rumored to be nearby. Meusebach himself had caught the treasure fever from hearing these tales, and he had a faint hope that by finding the mines he could extricate the German colonists and himself from their financial problems. Jim Bowie had followed the same rainbow to the old mission in 1829 and returned in 1832 to look for the treasure again, but as far as we know he found nothing. Meusebach and Roemer found no indications of smelting near the mission site, nor did Roemer believe that the geology of the area indicated silver ore. They did, however, find areas that were suitable for farming and colonization.

Meusebach, Roemer, and the explorers returned to the Comanche camp on the lower San Saba, concluded the treaty, and returned home.⁷ Meusebach continued intermittent association with the Comanches even after he resigned as head of the *Adelsverein*. There is a tale of one notable visit to his home at Comanche Springs. The Indians joined him at a very lavish dinner table, laid with linen and fine silver. They were on their way to negotiate with state authorities in Austin. On the return trip, unhappy about their treatment at the state capital and angry at whites generally, they stole all of Meusebach's horses.⁸

A legendary character of less fame and stature than Meusebach was a German hunter whom Frederick Olmsted refers to as "P." The main story about him concerns his killing five bears out of one den. "P." had already gained fame by single-handedly killing a wounded bear with a knife after the bear had enfolded him for a final hug. The five-bear story begins with his shooting and wounding a bear that later escaped into a deep crawl-way cave. "P." crawled in after the bear, found him dead, put a rope on him, and dragged him out. While doing this, he heard another bear moving about in

the cave, so he snaked himself back in, knife between his teeth and pistol in his hand. He fired at the sound of movement and made a hasty withdrawal. He went back into the cave with a torch, found the second bear dead, and another which he surmised had died from the smoke of his torch. He removed these bears and returned again with torches. In the depths of the cave he saw two sets of eyes, fired twice, and killed the last two bears. Olmsted concluded that formal history had no place for "P.," but that folklore did.⁹

The legends of the prowess of "P.," the imperturbability of Meusebach, the frontier egalitarianism of Fritz Ernst, and the remarkable adventures of the little girl and the White Stallion are the lengthened shadows of truth. The times and the places and the people were real. The stories that grew out of their experiences transcended reality and became Platonic truth. They were illustrations of ideals of strength and courage and endurance, virtues which could keep the settlers alive on the frontier. The Germans were not always brave and enduring, but their heroes embodied these qualities, and their legends helped them to develop the cultural self-image that was necessary for survival in their new land.

The source for much legend was the Germans' suffering during the Civil War, especially the Nueces Massacre, as it was sometimes called by the Germans, or the Battle of the Nueces, as it has gone down in history books.

The German settlers from the time of Texas's annexation had accepted the principles of the Union and had been from the first traditionally opposed to slavery. Few Germans, especially in the Hill Country, owned slaves. Additionally, most of them brought with them from Germany the sense of egalitarianism that was a part of the European eighteenth-century revolutionary movement. This romantic sense of equality was a stated part of Meusebach's treaty with the Comanches, in which he also formally discussed the possibilities of intermarriage between Germans and Indians.

The Hill Country Germans therefore found themselves in a sensitive position when Texas seceded from the Union. Lacking military protection against Indians, they formed a guard unit which, as the war went into its second year, was pronounced a threat to the Confederacy. When settlers were required to pledge loyalty to the Confederacy or leave the state, the unit was disbanded and sixty of the young German Unionists began a march to Mexico, either to join the Union army later or to sit out the war. They were ambushed on the Nueces River by Confederate forces before dawn on August 10, 1862. The battle lasted several hours, in spite of the fact that the hundred or more Confederate soldiers had caught the Unionists by surprise. Fritz Tegener, the Unionist leader, was seriously wounded in the first volley. According to German tradition, Emil Schreiner took command with the war cry, "*Lasst uns unser Leben so teuer wie möglich verkaufen*" ("Let us sell our lives as dearly as we can").

Of the sixty-five Unionists (the Germans, five Anglos, and a Mexican), nineteen were killed in the battle, nine of the wounded were captured and executed on the spot, eight more were killed in October as they were trying to cross the Rio Grande, and the survivors and their families were persecuted and terrorized for much of the remainder of the war. The families of the victims were afraid to go after the remains until the war was over. The ambush, the slaughter of the prisoners, and the disrespect paid to the slain Unionists were shocks that the Germans felt for years, and perhaps in some cases have never recovered from. After the war the remaining bones were retrieved from the battlefield and buried at Comfort under a monument that reads "*Treue der Union*" ("true to the Union"), the only Yankee monument in Texas.¹⁰

The villains of the Nueces River Massacre and the Civil War were long remembered in the tales of the Hill Country. Col. James M. Duff, the leader of the Confederate forces, was held the chief offender at the Nueces Massacre. According to legends and some histories, Duff was a Scot who came to the States, joined the army, was dishonorably discharged, and then drifted to Texas. His unsavory and "soulless" past equipped him for his role as enforcer when the German community was put under martial law in 1862. After the War he returned to Europe and died in Paris, and as D. H. Biggers concludes one version of Duff's tale: "the land his savage crime had stigmatized was saved the further shame of having its soil polluted with his decaying carcass."¹¹

Charles Bergman's (or Burgeman or Bauman) position in history and legend is ambiguous. No one is sure what forces caused him to be the betrayer of his people and lead the Confederates in search of the departing Germans. One survivor believed that he was an outsider who was a Confederate spy in the Unionists' camp. Another opinion was that he was one of the Unionists who was following a strayed horse and was captured by Duff, and because of his weakness was forced to give directions to the enemy. Whatever the circumstances, the Unionists needed a scapegoat and he was given an unsympathetic role to play in the legends of the Nueces Massacre. He went to Mexico after the War and reportedly became the leader of a band of outlaws. Bergman's story ends with the tale of his death at the hand of a Seminole Indian Negro (an interesting detail in itself), who threw his corpse in the Rio Grande. D. H. Biggers, an emotionally involved historian of the Germans, concludes the account: "Perhaps his last vision was that of a black face, wild with violence and dead to pity, black as the crime that will ever hover over the spot where the doomed refugees died, and black as the ghost that ever pursued the betrayer."¹²

Another man whose name became a part of the bitter memories and stories of the Civil War was one Waldrip, who led a band of terrorists during the *Henkerzeit*, or "hanging time." It is difficult from remaining accounts to tell whether he was a Confederate enforcer supported by the government or

whether he was simply an outlaw preying on the unprotected and continually harassed Germans of the Hill Country. Whatever his credentials, the results of his nocturnal visits were long remembered. His band roamed at will during the War, stealing, burning, and killing twice as many German settlers as the Indians killed during all their depredations. Waldrip ruled the area through force and a spy system that kept the populace in continual fear. After the War and during Reconstruction a Gillespie County grand jury indicted twenty-five of the terrorists, but very few of them were ever jailed or punished. Waldrip, for some reason, returned to Fredericksburg in 1867. He was recognized and tried to escape, but was shot down in front of the Nimitz Hotel. His dying words, "Oh God! Please don't shoot any more," carry the sound of proper poetic justice, as does the report that he was buried in a pauper's grave.¹³

The legends the Texas Germans told among themselves and about themselves tied their culture together through their ancestral community of history and happenings. Their customs tied them together by ways of living and doing things that were as much a part of the present as they were of the past.

The German settlers had one thing in common, their sense of German-ness, their *Deutschtum*, an ethnic bond that both strengthened and isolated them. The German leaders during those early hard days of the 1840s and 1850s, when the settlers were just getting a toehold in the new land, believed that the physical survival of the German immigrants depended on their being bound together by their language, customs, and traditions, and cooperating as a result of this bonding and isolation. Prince Karl feared dilution of the German spirit and German ways more than he feared the hardships of the new land. He warned the settlers to stay away from Anglos and directed that all settlements begin with pure German stock.¹⁴ He despaired of the bastardization of Germanic traditions of language and life style in the New World, of Anglicizing names, and of forgetting or renouncing the old customs.

Besides clinging to the old customs for the sake of survival, some of the early German observers of Texas felt that the unsophisticated frontier Anglos lacked traditions, which were necessary for an interesting and exciting life. A young German traveler, Gustav Dresel, was appalled that in Texas in 1839 New Year's Eve was not properly celebrated. At the time he was visiting a Mr. Stoner (formerly Herr Steiner) of Montgomery. Christmas had been disappointing—"Americans allow all these fine festival days to go by uncelebrated," he lamented—but he was determined to salvage New Year's. On New Year's Eve he purchased a large store of raw whiskey, charged his firearms, and began a tour of homes in the area, first discharging a volley, then offering the aroused farmers a drink, then recruiting them for a continuation of the tour. The party—which finally grew to fifteen—watched 1840 come in with an all-night banquet of ham, maize-cake, and egg nog, a celebration that fully satisfied Gustav's romantic and German expectations.¹⁵

As Dresel had remarked, Christmas was poorly celebrated by the Anglos, but there were good reasons for their lack of traditional spirit. They had been camping too long in the wilderness to maintain many of the civilizing customs, they were generations away from the source of their Old World customs, and as a part of a Puritan tradition that had largely abolished the secular social celebration of Christmas in 1644, some of them regarded that sort of celebration as pagan. The Germans of both the old and the new worlds had a different attitude toward this holy day. German Christmas customs can be traced back to the Roman Saturnalia (December 17-24) with its joy of welcoming the new year and its expression of hope for continuing fertility. The Scandinavian countries added to this the giving of gifts at the time of the winter solstice, and the Germans themselves were responsible for the introduction of the evergreen Christmas tree, a fairly late addition probably not more than two centuries old.¹⁶

Ferdinand Roemer spent Christmas of 1845 among Anglos in Galveston, where, he says, "The customary manner of celebrating it by decorating a tree and exchanging presents appeared to be unknown." He spent the following Christmas of 1846 among Germans of New Braunfels in the "jolly companionship of the Verein's officers around a richly decorated and illuminated Christmas tree, for which a young cedar was used. . . ."¹⁷ The tree and the fellowship were to Roemer German symbols of happy German family life and an indication of the growing stability of the new German colonies in Texas.

From their earliest days, Germans of Texas have cultivated the celebration of December as a festival month. Generous Saint Nicholas, the patron saint of children, traditionally comes first on his own holy day, December 6, and brings gifts to children. He keeps coming, leaving fruit and candy through the holy days and observing the children until Christmas Eve, at which time he visits the children when the candles on the trees are lighted. If they have been good they get gifts, if bad he leaves a bundle of switches to be used on them during the following year. Before he leaves he hears such prayers as the following:

*Ich bin klein;
Mein Herz ist rein;
Soll niemand drin wohnen
Als Jesus allein.*

I am small;
My heart is pure;
No one shall abide there
Save Jesus alone.

Sometimes more than one Saint Nicholas visits the house, and the main event of the evening is the family's visit to the church where there is another tree with gifts for the children. December's festivities end and the new year is welcomed with a dance. Fredericksburg for a long time had a very fashionable New Year's Ball that was celebrated with a dance, a midnight dinner, and a continuation of the festivities at the old Nimitz Hotel until dawn.

Gillespie County Germans evolved another custom that bespeaks practicality and good common sense. Some of the holy days—Christmas, Easter, Pentecost—are celebrated very solemnly. The day after—"Second Christmas" or "Second Easter"—is for singing and dancing and joyful festivities.¹⁸

Some of the customs of the old country blended with happenings in the new and took on different meanings altogether. In northwestern Germany, around Hannover and Westphalia, for centuries back into pagan times the folk in the spring built fires on the mountains and threw in horses' heads and goats' horns and drove their stock through the flames in order to protect them through the following year. This ritual also celebrated the ancient renewing of the hearth fires. With the coming of Christianity, the ritual became associated with Easter (sometimes with the burning of Judas), and the mountains where the fires were burned were called *Osterberge*, "Easter Hills." The fields and houses and people that the fire shone upon would be blessed with fertility in the coming year. The custom was brought to Texas and Fredericksburg, and over a period of time was changed to fit a new legend in the new land. In 1847, when Meusebach went to the Fisher-Miller lands to make the treaty with the Indians, the Comanches, according to local tradition, camped and built fires around Fredericksburg to see that the Germans were not tricking them. The mothers, to calm the frightened children, told them that Easter rabbits were in the hills dying eggs in wash pots with big fires under them. The Comanche-fires story has now become part of the traditional Texas German Easter customs and legends, in spite of the fact that historically Meusebach returned from Comanche territory several weeks before Easter—and whether the Comanches ever built fires around Fredericksburg is still a matter of speculation. But the Germanic Old World fires and the Old World fertility symbols of rabbits and eggs blended with the New World Indians into a modern legend.¹⁹

In addition to observing the nationally celebrated holidays, the Texas Germans have many other traditional occasions for gathering regularly. *Kinderfeste* and *Kindermaskenbälle* are springtime children's parties and frolics, similar to the Anglos' May Fete. The one at Prairie Hill in Washington County has been observed since the early settlement of this community in the 1870s. Prairie Hill also has long sponsored an annual *Schützenfest*, another German gathering. Those early pioneers took, and still take, great pride in their marksmanship, and today one can still find signs along the road near the German communities announcing shooting matches. Traditionally the marksmen's prize was a beef. The top four winners got their choices of the quarters according to their rank, and the loser got the hide and tallow.

The Germans brought with them from the Old Country a long tradition of folk music and singing clubs, and established similar clubs in the new communities. The *Liedertafel* ("Singing Society") of Comfort in Kendall

County has been functioning since its founding in 1870. The purpose of the group is not only to provide music for clubs and public entertainment but also to provide singing for weddings, anniversaries, funerals, and numerous other official functions. In addition, the *Liedertafel* functions as a service club, raising money for worthy causes. It was instrumental in 1881 in forming the *Texanischer Gebirgs-Sängerbund* ("Texas Hill Country Singing Alliance"), which organized singers from nearby communities and sponsored regular *Sängerfeste*. The first recorded formal *Sängerfest* in Texas, the *Deutsch-Texanisches Sängerfest*, was held in New Braunfels on October 17, 1853. In 1933 Comfort created a mixed choir, the *Comforter Gemischter Chor*, which formally integrated the local band with the choir. Such a combination was not new to the tradition, and the formalizing of it by creating a club is typical of German custom.

A song that the Germans sang in the Old Country and continued singing in the new was "Muss i denn." It is a sad farewell song of the same sort as the Anglos' "Gal I Left Behind Me," and its sentiment is echoed in an Irish farewell song called "Nora Darling," which became a popular Texas folk song. Bill Owens, who collected Texas folk songs in the 1940s, discussed this Irish-German kinship and told about a group of German emigrants who sailed out of Bremen harbor to the tune of "Muss i denn" and were greeted with the same song when they arrived at the docks in Galveston.²⁰ It is still a well-known song in Texas.

The Germans were great gatherers, mixers, and joiners, both as a result of their old traditions and because of their early isolation in the New World. Every town had its organizations and *Vereine*, its granges founded for the improvement of agricultural practices, singing and shooting societies, cultural and debating societies, and regular occasions for dancing. Singing and dancing and declaiming were somewhere near the heart of all their gatherings, whether the meetings were formal, like the three-day *Sängerfeste*, or informal. On the night before the Nueces Massacre the German Unionists took turns delivering speeches and singing German folk songs around the campfire, and Ferdinand Roemer and Meusebach and their companions spent an evening during their exploration of the San Saba River drinking and singing the old songs of the Fatherland. Frederick Olmsted tells that the Germans of New Braunfels concluded their serious observation of the Sabbath with a festive dance every Sunday night which the Lutheran minister was expected to attend.²¹

Every town had its tavern where the men customarily gathered to talk and sing and play games. Skat and pinochle have been long-time favorite games of Texas Germans. Leon Hale has described two more German games that are regularly played at Wagner's tavern-cafe-grocery store-filling station-and-bait stand at Winedale in Fayette County, near Round Top. *Mühle* ("flour mill") is a combination of checkers and tic-tac-toe and is played with

buttons or grains of corn. Another game, which was played with one die and a homemade board, was *Mensch ärgere dich nicht*, translated as "Friend, don't get upset"—which one was likely to do if he played the game.²²

German women were as gregarious as the men, and every settlement soon had its sewing clubs and study clubs, a *Damen-Lese-Verein* ("ladies' reading club"), garden and home demonstration clubs, as well as church-associated organizations. Less formal but equally traditional were the home-oriented *Kaffee-Klatsche* and *Kaffee-Kränzchen*, where the ladies gathered to chat and sew and drink coffee and eat *Schmierkäse* (cheese), *Mandel-Brot* (almond bread), *Zimt-Sterne* (cinnamon stars), *Lebkuchen* (gingerbread), and other traditional German treats.

The Anglos who had pushed off into the wilderness and left their doctors on the east coast developed their folk medicine from the Indians, who knew the native plants and molds that had curative powers. The Germans brought their medicine, both scientific and folk, straight from the Old Country. Germans provided Texas with some of its finest doctors and the first of its trained apothecaries. It also put into motion among Germans, Czechs, Wends, and their other neighbors a pattern of folk cures that went back to medieval and Renaissance Europe. A Texas-German cure for extracting a tooth without pain was popular in Brandenburg as far back as 1600: "Boil as many toads as you can catch. The grease will collect on top of the water. Take this congealed fat and anoint the tooth. Then you will be able to pull it without pain." Or for toothache: "Go to an ossuary and remove the same tooth from a skull as the one that is in pain. Rub the gums till they bleed on the old tooth. Replace the old tooth in the skull, but not with bare hands, and pray the Lord's prayer and one creed. And you're cured."

Along with the cures were curses. Disappointed lovers attending the wedding of the one they had lost could put a curse of barrenness on the couple by snapping shut a lock during the ceremony. This excellent example of imitative magic was called *Nestelknüpfen* ("tying the cord") and worked as long as the lock was hidden. The curse could be forestalled if the bride kept with her during the ceremony a lock with a key in it.

If a rejected lover wanted to cast a spell of impotence on the groom, he attended the wedding with his belt turned inside out and recited magic words, now fortunately lost. Throwing Saturnus herbs in front of the man as he was about to enter a door also purportedly caused impotence in a rival. To counteract these curses the groom boiled gentian, sundew, marjoram, and St. John's wort in beer and drank it before breakfast and before going to bed. If that failed, he could resort to the following charm: "Station a plough against sunrise, take the plough bar out and urinate three times through the hole. You will be helped." Unfortunately the prescriptionist doesn't say "cured."²³

Country stores in the German area for years carried *Blitz-Öl* ("Lightning Oil"), *Heil-Öl* ("Healing Oil") for curing wounds, *Schreck-Tee* ("Fright Tea")

and *Schreck-Kräuter* ("Fright Herbs") for tranquilizers, and *Teufels-Dreck* (asaphetida) to be used during epidemics of anything. *Lebenswecker* ("Life Awakeners"), instruments with little needles that were rolled over the skin, were used to cure rheumatism and arthritis and muscular pains. *Lebenswecker-Öl* was brushed on with a chicken feather.²⁴

The most significant aspect of early German culture is its architectural superiority over the early Anglo-Texan building culture. Little investigation is required to see that German building—houses and barns, fences and furniture—is more solidly and sophisticatedly constructed than that of the Anglos. The Anglos had begun their journey from the east coast of America a hundred years earlier. The generations had moved west, plowing and planting and moving on after they had exhausted their fields. As wanderers, most of them built few things to last and they carried little with them. Those who made a success out of their lives stayed in Kentucky and Tennessee or Georgia or Alabama; those who didn't, moved on to new lands in Texas. Many Texas settlers throughout the century could look back on two or three or more major moves to the west. Most of the Germans came straight from the Old Country with the civilized and socialized values—and probably with more capital—of their fatherland. Prince Karl noted the difference: "What with the warm climate and the unaccustomed food, life [for the German settler] is one of privation and hardship. For the Americans it is normal living. To the American settler, who generally does not own more than he actually has on his back, it seems strange that the Germans should burden themselves with so much baggage just to be able to live according to the standard of comfort of their own country."²⁵ Few Anglo-American settlers' houses in East Texas still stand. The builders required and made very few furnishings. They seldom decorated. On the other hand, many German houses of pre-Civil War days still stand solidly on their foundations. The furniture that the old craftsmen made is still usable and has grown in value over the years. And the artistic touches to both interior and exterior architecture are still the subject of admiration and masters' theses.

The first temporary shelters that many of the Germans built when they came to Texas were by necessity very primitive. Caroline von Hinüber, the daughter of Friedrich Ernst, the founder of Industry, tells about her family's first Texas home, which they occupied in 1831-32:

After we had lived on Fordtran's place for six months [Charles Fordtran, a tanner from Westphalia], we moved into our own house. This was a miserable little hut, covered with straw and having six sides, which were made out of moss. The roof was by no means water-proof, and we often held an umbrella over our bed when it rained at night, while the cows came and ate the moss. Of course, we suffered a great deal in the winter. My father had tried to build a chimney and fireplace out of logs and clay, but we were afraid to light a fire because of the extreme combustibility of our dwelling. So we had to shiver.²⁶

Ferdinand Roemer in 1846 described the temporary structures the Germans built when they first came to New Braunfels as consisting of a variety of makeshift buildings constructed by people who had no experience in building either in the old or new land. There were some log houses, but most were less formally built. Typical was the hovel made of cedar posts set side by side and roofed with an old tent or buffalo hides.²⁷ Frederick Olmsted described the German settlement of D'Hanis in 1854 as

a most singular spectacle upon the verge of the great American wilderness. It is like one of the smallest and meanest of European peasant hamlets. There are about twenty cottages and hovels, all built in much the same style, the walls being made of poles and logs placed together vertically and made tight with clay mortar, the floors of beaten earth, the windows without glass, and roofs built so as to overhang the four sides and deeply shade them, and covered with thatch of fine brown grass laid in a peculiar manner, the ridge-line and apex being ornamented with knots, tufts, crosses or weathercocks.²⁸

As the Texas Germans gained control of their environment they began to build after their own temperament and German traditions, and some of the houses they built in the better times of those early years still stand as monuments to one of the main characteristics of German building, the sense of permanence.

German building tradition did not create new house types in Texas, but it did introduce construction methods unfamiliar to previous settlers. *Fachwerk* was a building method brought from the Old Country. This half-timbered style consisted of vertical and diagonal wall framing members with the intervening spaces filled in with bricks or, as was usually the case in the Hill Country, with limestone. Plastering over the rock filler, or sometimes over other types of walls, was another German custom brought to Texas, as was whitewashing the exterior and interior of houses. The use of casemented windows and shutters was also a German contribution.

German building techniques blended with Anglo building styles, and the result was a very solidly built house, one that was constructed for sons and grandsons to live in. Roof lines were lower than they had been in the Old Country because there was little snow in central Texas. Outside staircases, long open galleries, and separately housed kitchens (as well as other outbuildings) were adopted from the Anglos in accommodation to Texas's warm climate. And because these new Texans didn't have to bring the stock into the house to protect it from the severity of winter, they did not need houses as large as those they had known in Germany.

By the 1890s house styles had been modified by acculturation to such an extent that German houses were little different from the houses of their neighbors. Their main distinction was that many were made of stone. Because of their settlements' proximity to limestone, Germans became very skilled in stone masonry and were in demand wherever public buildings were being constructed. Lime kilns were commonly run by the Germans in the Hill

Country. The old German houses of stone are still prominent features on the Hill Country landscape, and the area is honored by the strength and charm and endurance of that culture's architecture.²⁹

Frederick Olmsted contends that a German is responsible for the introduction of outhouses to Texas living, before that the convenience being "the back of a bush or the broad prairie—an indication of a queerly Texan incompleteness in cultivation of manners." One innovative and fastidious German built a privy only to have it wrecked by vandals and to find himself accused of public indecency. The same thing happened to his second privy, but he won with his third, which later became the model for several other outhouses in his town. All was peaceful until the following Christmas when all existing outhouses, now numbering twelve to fifteen, showed up neatly arranged in a line on the public square.³⁰

The survival of German folklore in Texas was the result not only of their traditional—and perhaps inherent—sense of *Deutschtum*, but of their history, of the many things that happened to them in the state. During the times of their troubles and isolation they clung to their old customs for comfort and survival. The trauma of their hardships during their first bad months in Texas in the 1840s caused a temporary breakdown in their social structure. The memories of those ill times were of living in holes in the ground, sick and dying with the pestilence, of family units breaking down, and of panic-stricken fight and flight for survival. The reaction to the chaos and anarchy of those early times was a tightening of traditions and folkways, a solidifying of their familiar German culture in order to make a stable foundation on which the new colonies could survive.

German history in Texas has been punctuated by periods of cultural estrangement and isolation as the nation went through wartime crises and Germans were forced into the role of being not only an ethnic but a political minority. During the Civil War, most of the German colonists in Texas were Unionists, and they were isolated by Southern hostility. Although they received some relief during Reconstruction, anti-German feelings continued for some years afterward. This phase of their separation, which was slowly and happily breaking down by the turn of the century, was revived again during World War I, when German traditions were associated with the Kaiser and with all that was believed to be evil in the world. Pressed by general public opinion and often harassed by the Ku Klux Klan, Texas Germans in some areas were forced to abandon their language in schools, churches, and business. Although this caused the breakdown of one level of their culture, the physical and social abuse many Germans felt during the war times caused them to retreat once more behind the barriers of their own traditions.

Fewer incidents of anti-German hysteria occurred in World War II. Considerable cultural integration had taken place during the ultra-democratic

1930s. The Depression and universal military conscription and training were forces that also ignored and leveled ethnic lines. The anxieties of the war, however, did arouse some latent anti-German sentiments, which were frequently based on economic rather than political reasons. One story circulated about an old German farmer from near Hermleigh in Scurry County who painted his barn roofs a bright red during the war, convincing his less prosperous Anglo neighbors that they were bright signposts purposely lined up to direct German aircraft on their way to bomb nearby Camp Barclay. Reacting to subtle and hostile pressures and remembering the problems of World War I, most Germans kept a low profile for the duration, purposely speaking English rather than German and de-emphasizing their German traditions.

A reaction against the melting-pot philosophy and the cultural leveling that was a part of it began in the 1960s, when the Germans—and everybody else—began to realize that not only ethnic identity but personal identity was being lost in the exploding population and mass urbanization in Texas, the nation, and the world. The Texas-German population, among the many other ethnic groups, is now consciously recovering and taking pride in the old traditions that have given their culture an individual strength that helped it in the past to survive and will give it a singular identity to live by in the future.

A man is remembered for the power of his full personality: the sight of him and his sound; how he moves and talks and walks; what he does that is his and nobody else's. He participates in the sum total of mankind, but because of his difference he is more than the numerator of one over the population of his culture or his country. And that is the way it is with the Germans of Texas. They are an integrated part of a population and a culture of a state, but because of their difference—their own culture's customs and traditions, their own songs and styles and the tales they tell of themselves and their past—because of their folklore they are more than their numbers and their German names and the German-named towns scattered all over the state suggest. Prince Karl had told them before they ever came across the water to "stay together and remain faithful to German culture and habits."³¹ They did. They suffered and endured and survived, and they brought a great richness to this land. And they still have their own cultural personality, and they are remembered.

NOTES

1. J. Frank Dobie, *The Mustangs* (New York: Bramhall House, 1952), pp. 164-168.
2. Frederick Law Olmsted, *Journey Through Texas* (Austin: Von Boeckmann-Jones Press, 1962), p. 95.

3. Caroline von Hinüber, "Life of German Pioneers in Early Texas," *Texas State Historical Association Quarterly* 2, No. 3 (Jan., 1899): 232.
4. Irene Marschall King, *John O. Meusebach* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1967), pp. 92-94 and 102-103.
5. *Ibid.*, pp. 155-156; Moritz Tiling, *History of the German Element in Texas from 1820-1850* (Houston: no. pub., 1913), p. 92.
6. King, *John O. Meusebach*, p. 67.
7. Good descriptions and discussions of the treaty can be found in the following: King, *John O. Meusebach*, pp. 111-123; Guido E. Ransleben, *A Hundred Years of Comfort in Texas* (San Antonio: The Naylor Co., 1954), pp. 9-14 (contains the proceedings of the treaty); Ferdinand Roemer, *Texas*, Oswald Mueller, trans. (San Antonio: Standard Printing Company, 1935), pp. 220-273. Roemer was there.
8. King, *John O. Meusebach*, pp. 118-119.
9. Olmsted, *Journey Through Texas*, pp. 130-132.
10. Several accounts of the Nueces Massacre are presented in Ransleben, *A Hundred Years of Comfort in Texas*, Chapter VI, pp. 79-126.
11. Don H. Biggers, *German Pioneers in Texas* (Fredericksburg: Fredericksburg Publishing Co., 1925), p. 59.
12. *Ibid.*
13. *Ibid.*, p. 71.
14. Karl von Solms-Braunfels, *Texas, 1844-1845*, translator unnamed (Houston: The Anson Jones Press, 1936), p. 100.
15. Gustav Dresel, *Houston Journal: Adventures in North America and Texas 1837-1841*, Max Freund, trans. (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1954), pp. 90-92.
16. *Funk & Wagnalls Standard Dictionary of Folklore, Mythology, and Legend*, two vols. (New York: Funk & Wagnalls Company, 1949), vol. I, pp. 229-230.
17. Roemer, *Texas*, pp. 48 and 215.
18. Julia Estill, "Customs Among the German Descendants of Gillespie County," *Coffee in the Gourd*, Publications of the Texas Folklore Society 2, 1923 (Dallas: SMU Press, Facsimile Reprint, 1969): 70-73.
19. Terry Jordan, "The Old World Antecedent of the Fredericksburg Easter Fires," *The Folklore of Texan Cultures*, Publications of the Texas Folklore Society 38 (Austin: Encino Press, 1974): 151-154.
20. William A. Owens, *Texas Folk Songs*, Publications of the Texas Folklore Society 23 (Austin: The Texas Folklore Society, 1950): 157.
21. Ransleben, *A Hundred Years of Comfort in Texas*, p. 108; Roemer, *Texas*, p. 251; and Olmsted, *Journey Through Texas*, p. 100.
22. Leon Hale, "A Lesson on Playing Mühle," *Some Still Do*, Publications of the Texas Folklore Society 39 (Austin: Encino Press, 1975): 74-76.
23. Christine Boot, "Home and Farm Remedies and Charms in a German Manuscript from a Texas Ranch," *Paisanos*, Publications of the Texas Folklore Society 41 (Austin: Encino Press, forthcoming 1978).
24. George R. Nielson, "Folklore of the German-Wends in Texas," Publications of the Texas Folklore Society 30 (Dallas: Southern Methodist University Press, 1961): 248-252.
25. Von Solms-Braunfels, *Texas, 1844-1845*, p. 95.

26. Von Hinüber, "Life of German Pioneers in Early Texas," p. 229.
27. Roemer, *Texas*, p. 93.
28. Olmsted, *Journey Through Texas*, p. 170.
29. Terry Jordan, "German Houses in Texas," *Landscape* 14 (Autumn, 1964): 24-26. See also the article by Maria Herrmann in this volume.
30. Olmsted, *Journey Through Texas*, p. 67 fn.
31. Von Solms-Braunfels, *Texas, 1844-1845*, p. 137.